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ABSTRACT

This report presents a brief overview of the changing labor market conditions for women and the steps taken to keep the Bureau of Labor Statistics data relevant to the social and economic setting in which these changes took place. Data tables and discussion are included on the following topics: working women in the 1970s; women workers and their families; women's earnings; spending patterns; and other changes and revisions in reporting BLS statistics on working women. (BM)

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Women in the Labor Force: Some New Data Series

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Women in the Labor Force: Some New Data Series

Janet L. Norwood and Elizabeth Waldman

Unprecedented numbers of women entered the labor force during the 1970's, beginning one of the most unique and dramatic periods of change in the role of women in our country. More women entered or reentered the work force during the 1970's than in any other decade in this century, helping to push the total number of persons in the civilian labor force to over 102 million. Except for the 1970-71 period, an average of well over a million women a year were added to the work force through the end of 1978. In fact, the gain of 1.9 million women during 1978 set a record, and by the first half of 1979 about 43 million women, or 51 percent of all women 16 years of age and over, were in the labor force (table 1).

This phenomenal influx of working women resulted in important changes in labor market conditions. Recognizing the need for statistical series to keep up with social change, the Bureau of Labor Statistics undertook a comprehensive review of the changing labor market status of working women and the data available for analyzing this change. In this process, we found it necessary to remodel some data series, develop and introduce new ones, change outdated terminology, and issue new statistical tables and reports. This report presents a brief overview of the changing labor market conditions for women and the steps taken to keep BLS statistics on working women relevant to the social and economic setting in which these changes took place.

Working women in the 1970's

Most of the record gain in women's labor force participation in the 1970's occurred among women under 35 years of age. By the late 1960's, the large cohort of post-World War II baby boom children had reached labor force age. They entered the work force during a period of rapid economic growth and prosperity and also of striking social changes. On the one hand, the economy needed new workers for its burgeoning white-collar and service jobs. On the other hand, the young female labor force entrants were more highly educated than those in the past and were starting their work lives at a time when newly passed laws prohibited sex discrimination in employment and wages. In addition, social views were changing, and it was considered much more acceptable than ever before for young wives and mothers to work outside of their homes.

Why did so many of these women work? It is difficult to find a fully satisfactory explanation. A significant group of women, of course, worked because they or their families were dependent on their earnings. In addition, some argue that the women's liberation movement, which took hold in the 1960's and has continued through the current decade, has increased women's awareness of opportunities in the world of work. Others maintain that the new labor force role of women may itself have stimulated a strong reaction to existing or perceived inequities. Discussions of these and many other issues took place in Houston in 1977 at the first

Table 1. Women in the labor force, selected years, 1900-1978

Year	Women in the labor force (thousands)	Women in the labor force as a percent of:	
		Total labor force	All women of working age
1900	4,999	18.1	20.0
1910	8,076	21.2	23.4
1920	8,229	20.4	22.7
1930	10,396	21.9	23.6
1940	13,007	24.6	25.8
1945	19,304	29.2	35.8
1950	18,412	28.8	33.9
1955	20,584	30.2	35.7
1960	23,272	32.3	37.8
1965	26,232	34.0	39.3
1970	31,560	36.7	43.4
1971	32,132	37.0	43.4
1972	33,320	37.4	43.9
1973	34,561	38.0	44.7
1974	35,892	38.5	45.7
1975	37,087	39.1	46.4
1976	38,520	39.7	47.4
1977	40,067	40.3	48.5
1978	42,002	41.0	50.1
1979 (6-month average January-June)	43,094	41.2	50.8

NOTE: Labor force data for 1900 to 1930 refer to gainfully employed workers. For 1900 to 1945, data are for persons 14 years of age and over; beginning in 1950, data are for persons 16 years of age and over.

SOURCE: Data for 1900 to 1970, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bureau of the Census; data for 1975 to 1979, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1979 and July 1979 issues, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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national women's conference in this country in over 100 years, but they did not bring the widely divergent points of view into agreement.

It may also be that the job opportunities of the late 1960's and early 1970's played a part in the decisions of many young couples either to postpone having their first child or not to have any at all. The birth rate per thousand population plummeted from 19.4 in 1965 to 14.7 in 1976, the lowest level ever recorded. Since then, the rate has edged up over the 15.0 level (15.3 in 1978) but shows no sign of strong and continued upward movement. What seems to be happening now is that women in their late twenties and early thirties are beginning to have the children they delayed bearing at the outset of the decade. However, average family size is expected to remain around 2.1 children per family, because today's young women plan to have fewer children than their counterparts in earlier generations.[1]

The exceptionally low birth rates during the 1970's have taken place in a period which also has included the highest divorce rates on record. Since 1970, the proportion of all women workers who are divorced or single has risen a few percentage points, reaching about 10 and 25 percent, respectively, while the proportion who are married has dropped from 59 to 55 percent (March 1979 estimate). Nevertheless, despite the usually higher labor force participation rates of divorced, single, and separated women, and the rising proportion of these women who maintain their own families, married women continued to account for the largest share of the increase in participation for all women (table 2).

The most spectacular increase in labor force participation has been for women 25 to 34 years of age. Many women in this age group, who in the past typically stopped working when they married or had children, are no longer doing so. Their labor force participation rate advanced an astounding 17 percentage points between 1970 and 1978, reaching 62 percent in 1978. This is remarkable because over 70 percent of women in this age group are married, live with their husbands, and have children under age 18 at home. In fact, by 1978, about 16.1 million women in the labor force had children under age 18, and, of these, about 5.8 million had children under age 6. The labor force participation rate for all women with preschool age children was 44 percent in 1978, compared with only 30 percent in 1970.

It is clear from this brief review of the data that the age configuration and marital composition of the female labor force of the 1970's is significantly different from prior decades. But, as the following figures indicate, the general patterns of employment and unemployment of women bear a great similarity to the past.

As in the past, most working women in the 1970's are employed full time (35 hours or more per week) or, if unemployed, are looking for full-time jobs. In May 1979, 3 of every 4 employed women held full-time jobs, and 3 of every 4 unemployed women were looking for full-time jobs. Thus the idea that most women are part-time workers is a myth.

Women can now be found in virtually every job category listed in our national census of occupations. Although they have made inroads into jobs associated with higher status and earnings, the great majority still hold jobs in the traditional fields in which women were

[1] "Advance Report, Final Natality Statistics, 1977," *Monthly Vital Statistics Report* (PHS) 79-1120 (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Health Statistics, Feb. 5, 1979), p. 9. Also, see "Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths for 1978," *Monthly Vital Statistics Report* (PHS) 79-1120, Vol. 27, No. 12 (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Health Statistics, Mar. 15, 1979), p. 1, and "Fertility of American Women: June 1977," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 325 (Bureau of the Census, 1978), p. 25.

Table 2. Changes in civilian labor force by sex and marital status, 1970, 1977, and 1978

(Numbers in thousands)

Sex and marital status	Civilian labor force			Change from March 1970 to March 1978	
	March 1970	March 1977	March 1978	Number	Percent distribution of change
Both sexes, total	81,693	95,766	98,437	16,744	100.0
Men, total	50,460	56,393	57,466	7,006	41.8
Never married	9,421	13,188	13,978	4,557	27.2
Married, wife present	38,123	38,704	38,507	384	2.3
Married, wife absent	1,053	1,436	1,703	650	3.9
Widowed	672	571	567	−105	−.6
Divorced	1,191	2,496	2,711	1,520	9.1
Women, total	31,233	39,374	40,971	9,738	58.2
Never married	6,965	9,470	10,222	3,257	19.5
Married, husband present	18,377	22,377	22,789	4,412	26.3
Married, husband absent	1,422	1,715	1,802	380	2.3
Widowed	2,542	2,251	2,269	−273	−1.6
Divorced	1,927	3,561	3,888	1,961	11.7

NOTE: Due to rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

employed in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's (tables 3 and 4). The largest single occupational category in which women are employed today is still the clerical one—stenographers, typists, secretaries—a category that first gained prominence among women in the 1920's and 1930's and continued to grow after World War II. In absolute numbers, the employment of women has increased the most in clerical and service jobs. In May 1979, 80 percent of all clerical workers and nearly 60 percent of service workers (excluding private household workers) were women, compared to 62 and 45 percent, respectively, in 1950.

Table 3. Occupational distribution of employed women, annual averages, selected years, 1950-78

(Percent)

Occupational group	1950	1960	1970	1978	Women as percent of all workers in occupational group, 1978
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	41.2
Professional-technical	12.5	12.4	14.5	15.6	42.7
Managerial-administrative, except farm	4.4	5.0	4.5	6.1	23.4
Sales	8.7	7.7	7.0	6.9	44.8
Clerical	27.8	30.3	34.5	34.6	79.6
Craft	1.5	1.0	1.1	1.8	5.6
Operatives, including transport	19.6	15.2	14.5	11.8	31.8
Nonfarm laborers	.8	.4	.5	1.3	10.4
Service, except private household	12.4	14.8	16.5	17.7	59.1
Private household	8.7	8.9	5.1	2.9	97.7
Farm	3.6	4.1	1.8	1.3	18.2

NOTE: For 1950, data are for women 14 years and over; for later years, data are for women 16 years and over.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Partly as a result of this traditional occupational profile, women's earnings are still, on average, far below those of men. As in earlier decades, today's full-time women workers earn, on average, approximately 60 percent of what men earn. Although this proportion varies a great deal by occupation, women's earnings rarely reach parity with men's, even in the same general occupational group. For example, women teachers in today's elementary or high schools average about 85 percent of what male teachers earn. Even in the clerical field, women's earnings are not on a par with men's.

As women have become a larger proportion of the labor force, they also have become a larger proportion of the unemployed. Back in 1930, unemployed women were less than a fifth of all unemployed persons; in 1950, they were a third; today, they account for half of the unemployed. From less than a half million women in 1930, with an unemployment rate below that of men, today's unemployed women number around 3 million, with an unemployment rate substantially above that of men. Generally, women's unemployment rates have remained higher than men's, with the gap usually widening when business activity is buoyant and narrowing during sluggish periods (table 5). Although unemployment rates go up during recessions for both men and women, the rates for men tend to rise more because of their concentration in hard goods manufacturing and other cyclically senstive industries.

One reason the women's unemployment rate is usually higher than that for men when economic conditions are relatively good is that at that time a greater proportion of women than men are entering or reentering the labor force. In May 1979, 47 percent of the

Table 4. Employment in selected occupations, 1950, 1970, and 1978

(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation	Both sexes			Women as percent of all workers in occupation		
	1950	1970	1978	1950	1970	1978
Professional-technical	4,858	11,452	14,245	40.1	40.0	42.7
Accountants	377	711	975	14.9	25.3	30.1
Engineers	518	1,233	1,265	1.2	1.6	2.8
Lawyers-judges	171	277	499	4.1	4.7	9.4
Physicians-osteopaths	184	280	424	6.5	8.9	11.3
Registered nurses	403	836	1,112	97.8	97.4	96.7
Teachers, except college and university	1,123	2,750	2,992	74.5	70.4	71.0
Teachers, college and university[1]	123	492	562	22.8	28.3	33.8
Writers-artists-entertainers	124	761	1,193	40.3	30.1	35.3
Managerial-administrative, except farm	4,894	6,387	10,105	13.8	16.6	23.4
Bank officials-financial managers	111	313	573	11.7	17.6	30.4
Buyers-purchasing agents	64	361	370	9.4	20.8	30.5
Food service workers	343	323	589	27.1	33.7	33.8
Sales managers-department heads; retail trade	142	212	343	24.6	24.1	37.3
Clerical	6,865	13,783	16,904	62.2	73.6	79.6
Bank tellers	62	251	449	45.2	86.1	91.5
Bookkeepers	716	1,552	1,630	77.7	82.1	90.7
Cashiers	230	824	1,403	81.3	84.0	87.1
Office machine operators	143	563	827	81.1	73.5	74.2
Secretaries-typists	1,580	3,814	4,570	94.6	96.6	98.6
Shipping-receiving clerks	287	413	461	6.6	14.3	22.8

[1]Includes college and university presidents.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Table 5. Unemployment rates of women and men, annual averages, selected years, 1930-78

Year	Percent of labor force unemployed			Women's rate minus men's rate
	Both sexes	Women	Men	
1930	5.2	4.2	5.4	-1.2
1940	14.9	13.6	15.4	-1.8
1950	5.3	5.7	5.1	.6
1955	4.4	4.9	4.2	.7
1960	5.5	5.9	5.4	.5
1965	4.5	5.5	4.0	1.5
1970	4.9	5.9	4.4	1.5
1971	5.9	6.9	5.3	1.6
1972	5.6	6.6	4.9	1.7
1973	4.9	6.0	4.1	1.9
1974	5.6	6.7	4.8	1.9
1975	8.5	9.3	7.9	1.4
1976	7.7	8.6	7.0	1.6
1977	7.0	8.2	6.2	2.0
1978	6.0	7.2	5.2	2.0
May 1979 (seasonally adjusted)	5.8	7.0	4.9	2.1

SOURCE: Data for 1930 to 1940, Bureau of the Census, Series P-44, No. 6, Mar. 25, 1944. Data for 1950 to 1979, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

jobseeking women 20 years old and over were either entering the labor force for the first time or reentering it, double the proportion for men. At the same time, only 37 percent of the unemployed women, compared with 60 percent of the men, had lost their job.

As the 1970's progressed, the dual-worker family became a well-established fact of American life. Furthermore, the greatest percentage increase in women's labor force participation rates occurred for those with preschool age children, and the number of women who were the mainstay of their own family—very frequently a family with young children—rose to the highest level ever recorded in this country.

In view of these changes, it became clear to BLS analysts that more specific data were needed to reflect the current employment situation of persons in a family context; that more timely weekly and hourly earnings data were necessary for analyzing wage differences by sex; and that expenditure and family budget data needed to reflect the contribution of working women. In addition, much more needed to be done in the area of statistics on minority groups. The following sections of this report describe some of the changes the Bureau of Labor Statistics has put into effect to meet these needs.

Women workers and their families

Like most others in the population, most women workers—84 percent—live in family groups. The BLS has been reporting on aspects of working women in families since 1959. At that time, the function of reporting national employment and unemployment statistics was transferred to the BLS from the Bureau of the Census. BLS continued to tabulate data on the situation of workers in the family once a year from information obtained in the Current Population Survey (CPS) each March. Supplemental CPS questions permitted us to report on the labor force status of family members by such factors as the presence and age of children, family income, education, and weeks worked and weeks unemployed during the previous calendar year. This information has been published in our annual series of Special Labor Force Reports on the marital and family characteristics of workers, as well as in other reports on specific subjects, such as children of working mothers and women who head families.

But, with the dramatic increase in women's labor force participation and its continuation even during the deep recession of 1974-75, new and more timely approaches to statistics on the family became necessary. We could not wait for a whole year to find out how much of the increase in the number of working wives was related to their husband's unemployment; or whether women without young children were more likely than others to enter the work force; or how concentrated unemployment was within different types of families.

Thus, BLS began developing a package of person-family data based on special monthly tabulations from the CPS. Initial findings were reported at the American Statistical Association meetings in Boston in August 1976.[2] The statistics were so promising that they were first published on a quarterly basis in 1977 and are now reliable enough to be published each month in the BLS periodical *Employment and Earnings* (table 6). The data continue to confirm one of the most striking long-term findings about women in married-couple families—wives with unemployed husbands have considerably more difficulty in finding jobs than wives with employed husbands. In May 1979, the unemployment rate of 15.6 percent for the half million wives of unemployed husbands was more than 3-1/2 times the rate (4.0 percent) for the 20.8 million wives of employed husbands. Plans are now underway to obtain monthly person-family data by the presence and age of children. We expect that the initial statistics will be available sometime in 1980.

As BLS proceeded to develop its person-family labor force series, we recognized that several other changes were required. Several of these priorities were reported in an article in the July 1977 issue of the *Monthly Labor Review*.[3] The article pointed out that the definition of the average American family which was so frequently used to illustrate many of our country's

[2] See Howard Hayghe, "New Monthly Data on Employment and Unemployment in the American Family," in American Statistical Association *Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section, 1976, Part I*, pp. 391-95. See also an article by the same author, "New Data Series on Families Shows Most Jobless Have Working Relatives," *Monthly Labor Review*, Dec. 1976, pp. 46-49.

[3] Janet L. Norwood, "New Approaches to Statistics on the Family," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1977, pp. 31-37.

Table 6. Employment status of the noninstitutional population by family relationship, May 1979

(Numbers in thousands)

Family relationship	Civilian labor force					Not in labor force				
	Total	Percent of population	Employed	Unemployed		Total	Keeping house	Going to school	Unable to work	Other reasons
				Number	Percent of labor force					
Total, 16 years and over	101,473	63.0	96,200	5,253	5.2	59,708	32,752	8,951	2,996	15,009
Husbands[1]	40,771	81.4	39,817	954	2.3	9,316	130	229	1,199	7,758
With employed wife	20,356	92.0	19,939	417	2.0	1,780	30	112	371	1,267
With unemployed wife	909	91.7	832	77	8.5	81	—	7	26	49
With wife not in labor force	17,669	71.8	17,280	389	2.2	6,951	74	90	723	6,067
Wives	23,127	48.4	22,135	992	4.3	24,622	22,545	265	335	1,477
With employed husband	20,771	54.6	19,938	833	4.0	17,279	16,222	222	100	737
With unemployed husband	495	56.0	418	77	15.6	389	357	5	8	18
With husband not in labor force	1,860	21.1	1,779	81	4.4	6,953	5,966	38	226	723
Relatives in husband-wife families	13,951	60.1	12,421	1,529	11.0	9,282	1,319	6,243	387	1,334
16-19 years	6,457	54.6	5,596	861	13.3	5,379	170	4,888	21	300
20-24 years	4,801	73.9	4,320	481	10.0	1,696	186	1,241	29	240
25 years and over	2,693	55.0	2,505	187	6.9	2,207	963	114	337	794
Women who head families	4,996	59.3	4,598	397	7.9	3,433	2,744	114	165	410
Relatives in female-headed families	3,955	54.4	3,305	650	16.4	3,309	847	1,466	259	737
16-19 years	1,297	48.0	959	338	26.1	1,408	95	1,178	6	128
20-24 years	1,156	68.9	961	194	16.8	522	133	235	14	140
25 years and over	1,502	52.1	1,385	118	7.9	1,379	619	53	239	469
Persons not living in families[2]	14,673	60.1	13,924	731	5.0	9,746	5,167	634	651	3,293

[1]Includes a small number of single, separated, widowed, or divorced men who head families.

[2]Individuals living alone or with unrelated persons plus a small number of persons in secondary families.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, June 1979, p. 29.

Table 7. Husband-wife families by number of earners and size of family, March 1978, and median family income in 1977

(Number of families in thousands)

Number of earners	Total	Size of family						Median family income[1]
		2 persons	3 persons	4 persons	5 persons	6 persons	7 persons or more	
Total husband-wife families	47,385	17,185	10,123	10,506	5,598	2,363	1,609	$17,600
With no earners	5,066	4,351	379	170	85	41	40	7,000
With one earner	14,870	5,487	3,080	3,472	1,774	691	367	15,000
Husband only	12,941	4,428	2,586	3,291	1,661	643	332	15,600
Wife only	1,427	1,059	182	101	45	23	17	10,400
Other relative only	502	—	312	80	68	25	17	12,200
With two earners	20,632	7,347	5,270	4,767	2,089	746	413	19,400
Husband and wife only	17,604	7,347	4,033	3,891	1,628	489	216	19,100
Husband and other relative, only	2,623	—	1,062	762	406	225	168	22,000
Husband is nonearner	405	—	175	113	55	33	29	15,700
With three earners or more	6,816	—	1,395	2,098	1,649	885	789	26,600
Husband and wife earners	5,508	—	1,395	1,724	1,251	632	507	26,400
Husband an earner, wife nonearner	1,169	—	—	341	350	226	251	27,900
Husband is nonearner	139	—	—	33	49	27	30	20,100

[1]Income rounded to nearest $100.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

policies was no longer valid. The so-called typical family was often defined as consisting of a husband who works, a wife who is not in the labor force, and two children. In 1978, only 7 percent of the married-couple families fit this definition, while 58 percent of these families had two or more earners (table 7).

Another needed change spearheaded by BLS, along with the Census Bureau, was the elimination of the standard CPS procedure that automatically designated the husband as the "head" of every married-couple household. The basic concept which had been carried through nearly two centuries of U.S. censuses and sample surveys was:

1. Every household must have a head.
2. When both husband and wife are present, the husband, by definition, is always the head, never the wife.
3. A woman can be classified as the head of a household only if she has never married or has no husband present because of death, divorce, or legal separation.

Changing lifestyles and social attitudes during the 1970's made it clear that the arbitrary "headship" designation in the CPS required change. The BLS, in 1977, stopped publishing the data series on unemployment of household heads in our monthly press releases and in *Employment and Earnings*. Instead, separate data were published on married men, married women, and women who head families. Also, the term "head" was dropped from all published tables and analyses concerning married-couple families.

A few months later, the Census Bureau, after discussions with its advisory groups, consultation with BLS and other user agencies, and testing of new data collection procedures, announced that the term household head would not be used in the 1980 Census.

In the fall of 1978, CPS enumerators were instructed to stop designating a head for each household in the sample and instead to identify a "reference person" who is "the person or one of the persons who owns (or rents) the home." The term "householder" has been selected by the Census Bureau (not without heated debate from the BLS) to be used for "reference person" in published CPS and decennial census material. Examples of how BLS will use the term are shown in table 8.

In sum, BLS has been actively engaged in restructuring its statistical series on all workers in general and on women specifically, as well as on all persons in families. We believe our new data on the employment situation of persons in the family can provide new and valuable insights into the family as an economic unit and the interactive labor market status of persons within it. The reactions of female family members to cyclical downturns, recoveries, and upswings can be observed and measured as they happen. Researchers in the area of economic hardship can be provided with a rich statistical base with which to evaluate policy initiatives aimed at helping families through swings in the business cycle.

Women's earnings

The old saying that "the more things change, the more they stay the same" seems to apply to women's earnings in relation to men's no matter which earnings series we examine—earnings covering an entire year or usual weekly earnings obtained up to now in the May CPS supplement. Soon, as the result of a new BLS program, we shall be able to analyze earnings data each quarter. This should enable us to provide an assessment of the earnings situation of women on a more current basis than is presently the case.

The basic ratios of women's to men's earnings have not changed much for years, as a brief review of our two basic CPS series (annual and weekly) demonstrates. In 1939, median earnings for women who worked year round, full time in the experienced labor force were $788, or 58 percent of the median for men. Similar figures for 1977, the latest period for which earnings over

Table 8. Changes in household terminology in the Current Population Survey

1940-75	1976-79: Transition	1980—: Proposed
Total households	Total households	Total households
Primary families, total	Primary families, total	Family households, total
Male head	Husband-wife family	Married-couple family
Husband-wife family	Male head, no wife present	Male householder, no wife present
Other male-headed family	Female head, no husband present	Female householder, no husband present
Female head		
Primary individuals, total	Primary individuals, total	Nonfamily households, total
Male head, living with nonrelatives	Male head, living with nonrelatives	Male householder, living with nonrelatives
Female head, living with nonrelatives	Female head, living with nonrelatives	Female householder, living with nonrelatives
Head living alone	Head living alone	Householder, living alone
Male	Male	Male
Female	Female	Female

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

an entire year are available, show median earnings of about $8,800 for women, or 59 percent of the median for men.[4]

In the 10 years since BLS first requested the Census Bureau to collect weekly earnings data in May of each year, the ratio of women's to men's usual earnings has shown about the same pattern as in the calendar year series; in May 1978, just as in May 1967, women full-time workers still had median earnings that were only a little over 60 percent (61-62 percent) of the median earnings of men[5] (table 9). Preliminary data from our newly developed quarterly series show that the same ratio held in the second quarter of 1979.

By occupation, these data show that, although the male-female earnings ratio has varied considerably over the years, the median for women is usually substantially lower than the median for men. For example, in sales occupations, where a large proportion of women are employed in retail stores while a large proportion of men sell cars, machinery, and insurance, women's earnings in the second quarter of 1979 were about half of men's earnings (table 10). In the professional-technical area, where proportionately more women than men are in the lower paying occupations, i.e., nurses rather than physicians, women's earnings were approximately 70 percent of men's. In the clerical field, women's wages were about 63 percent of men's wages.[6]

Almost all secretaries are women, as are 97 percent of all nurses, 86 percent of all file clerks, and 85 percent of librarians. On the other hand, only 9 percent of industrial engineers are women, 9-1/2 percent of all lawyers and judges, 11 percent of all doctors, and 30 percent of all accountants.

These more detailed occupational statistics demonstrate that, on the average, employed women are working primarily in jobs at the low end of the pay scale. Even in a generally less traditional industry sector for women such as manufacturing, women are concentrated in such industries as clothing or electrical equipment where wages are lower than in many other types of factories.

We recognize, of course, that the overall female-male earnings gap needs to be interpreted with care. Occupational and industry differences and the extent of labor force activity are, obviously, not the only factors involved. The fact that married women constitute the largest proportion of women workers may also play a large role in the female-male wage differential. Some analysts believe that many married women may put convenience of location or flexibility of hours above earnings or that they may not be as able as men to accept a promotion to a job with heavier responsibilities or a job which requires a great deal of overtime. Others believe that women have not yet gained the self-confidence needed to seek aggressively the opportunities taken by men.

Whether these analysts are correct in their interpretations or not, we should not overlook discrimination. Many of the court settlements over equal pay in recent years have been based on findings of discrimination. Proof of discrimination, however, must go much farther than sample survey data such as the CPS.[7] But CPS statistics can continue to provide guidelines as to what the earnings situation is for women and men in similar circumstances.

Table 9. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by sex, 1967-78

Year	Usual weekly earnings		Women's earnings as percent of men's
	Women	Men	
May of:			
1967	$ 78	$125	62
1969	86	142	61
1970	94	151	62
1971	100	162	62
1972	106	168	63
1973	116	188	62
1974	124	204	61
1975	137	221	62
1976	145	234	62
1977	156	253	62
1978	166	272	61

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Table 10. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by sex and occupational group, second quarter 1979 (preliminary)

Occupational group	Women	Men	Women's earnings as percent of men's
Total	$183	$295	62
Professional-technical	261	375	70
Managerial-administrative, except farm	232	386	60
Sales	154	297	52
Clerical	180	287	63
Craft	189	305	62
Operatives, except transport	156	257	61
Transport equipment operatives	194	277	70
Nonfarm laborers	166	220	75
Service	138	203	68
Farm	125	153	82

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

[4] Detailed calendar year earnings were first obtained for 1955 along with work experience data in the CPS of March 1956; they have been analyzed in many of the BLS Special Labor Force Reports since 1959.

[5] Janice Neipert Hedges and Earl F. Mellor, "Weekly and Hourly Earnings of U.S. Workers, 1967-78," *Monthly Labor Review*, Aug. 1979, pp. 31-41.

[6] Anne McDougall Young, "Median Earnings in 1977 Reported for Year-Round Full-Time Workers," *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1979, pp. 35-39; Anne McDougall Young, "Year-Round Full-Time Earnings in 1975," Special Labor Force Report 203, (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1977); and E. Waldman and B.J. McEaddy, "Where Women Work—An Analysis by Industry and Occupation," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1974, pp. 3-13.

[7] See, for example, Phyllis A. Wallace, ed., *Equal Employment Opportunity and the AT&T Case* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1976).

The two historical series of annual and weekly-hourly earnings data from the CPS have served us well in analyzing nearly all aspects of women's earnings. However, the enormous labor force gains among women in the 1970's have made the need for more timely demographic earnings data a pressing matter. The new quarterly earnings series of BLS should permit policymakers and researchers to analyze earnings data for many groups of the population on a more current basis.

The development of reliable current earnings data in the CPS has not been an easy task for several reasons. First, because the statistics are based on a sample, they may differ from figures that would be obtained by a complete census of the population. Second, participation in the sample is voluntary and the earnings questions are particularly sensitive for some respondents. Therefore, they have a higher nonresponse rate than other questions in the CPS. Because of these and other limitations—which are discussed at length in BLS reports[8]—the household survey can be expected to report earnings data with somewhat less accuracy than employer payroll records. The problem, however, is that the payroll records rarely contain the detailed characteristics of employees that are needed to study important socioeconomic and demographic issues.

We expect to release the new quarterly data later this year. Table 10 contains a preview of median earnings by occupation for the second quarter of 1979.

Spending patterns

The BLS has been reporting on the spending patterns of various segments of the population since it conducted its first expenditure survey in 1888-91. These surveys have been conducted about once every 10 years as a part of the decennial CPI revision. The latest Consumer Expenditure Survey was conducted in 1972-73.[9]

In a paper based on these data presented at last year's session of the Women's Caucus, Elizabeth Waldman and Eva Jacobs of the BLS staff discussed the differences in average spending patterns for husband-wife families with and without a working wife.[10] Among the findings were that families with both the husband and wife as earners were younger, smaller, had a higher income, and, on the average, spent more on food away from home, women's clothing, domestic and household services and transportation. However, these differences in expenditures tend to diminish when incomes of the one- and two-earner families are held constant.

The lack of timely expenditure data has been a particularly frustrating experience for BLS, but we have not been idle. A few years ago, we persuaded Congress that more frequent expenditure surveys would provide more timely data and substantially shorten the time for processing and distributing the data. After Congress authorized an ongoing survey, we began gearing up for the Continuing Consumer Expenditure Survey. Collection of data for the new program has already begun.

The main objectives of the new continuing survey program are: (1) to provide policymakers with data on changes in consumer spending patterns required for assessing alternative approaches to such issues as energy and tax policy; (2) to provide expenditure data for future revisions of the Consumer Price Index; (3) to establish a more up-to-date and flexible data system that could serve a variety of analytical and research purposes; and (4) to provide data that would facilitate more frequent updates of the BLS Family Budgets.

One of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' important program needs is the revision of the BLS Family Budget program. At present, family budgets are calculated for a retired couple and for a precisely defined urban family of four: A husband employed full time, a nonworking wife, and two school-age children. Although the BLS family budgets' 4-person family may represent a stage in the life cycle for some American families, it does not reflect a typical or average family. As discussed earlier, the two-earner family has become well established, and many other changes in lifestyle have taken place in recent years.

To help in the revision of the Family Budget program, BLS has contracted with the Wisconsin Poverty Institute to establish a committee of experts to examine all aspects of the program, including the methodology, family types to be covered, and geographic coverage. Their deliberations are now underway and we expect to receive their recommendations early in 1980.

These are difficult issues that cannot be easily resolved. We believe, however, that by seeking the advice of outside experts, the BLS has taken an important and worthwhile step forward in this area despite the difficult work ahead.

Other changes

In addition to the changes already described, the BLS has made many other advances in areas concerning women's statistics. For instance, during the 1970's we desexed the language on BLS survey forms and publications (e.g., the term "man hours" was changed to "work hours"). We also initiated the regular publication of a new data series on women based on the sample survey of the payrolls of 165,000 business establishments. The new monthly series from the establishment

[8] See *Weekly and Hourly Earnings Data from the Current Population Survey*, Special Labor Force Force Report 195 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1977). See also *BLS Measures of Compensation*, Bulletin 1941, (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1977).

[9] See the following bulletins published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the *Consumer Expenditure Survey* series: *Diary Survey, July 1972-June 1974*, Bulletin 1959 (1977); *Integrated Diary and Interview Survey Data, 1972-73*, Bulletin 1992 (1978); and *Interview Survey, 1972-73*, Vol. I., *U.S. Tables*, and Vol. II, *Regional Tables*, Bulletin 1997 (1978).

[10] See Elizabeth Waldman and Eva E. Jacobs, "Working Wives and Family Expenditures," in American Statistical Association *1978 Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section*, pp. 41-49.

survey shows the seasonally adjusted numbers of employed women in 37 industries. This is in addition to the unadjusted estimates published each month for women on the payrolls of 437 of the 511 industries covered in this nationwide survey.[11]

In the past, labor force statistics on workers in minority groups were included with other data in such a way that clear-cut analysis of trends was often impossible. However, as with other data produced by the BLS, the socioeconomic changes of the 1970's called for more specific information than could be obtained when blacks were always in the "black and other" group, and most Hispanics were subsumed in the "white" group. For the past several years, BLS staff have been working on disaggregating labor force data so that statistically reliable figures for these two important minority groups could be tabulated and published.

At present, a historical series of seasonally adjusted monthly data is being developed for both black and Hispanic workers. Seasonally adjusted data for black workers by sex were introduced in the February 1977 issue of *Employment and Earnings* (E&E) and unadjusted figures now appear regularly in this BLS publication. The employment situation of both black and Hispanic workers by age was analyzed in the April 1979 E&E and the unadjusted data are now published quarterly. Annual data on their occupations and industry of employment were published for the first time this year, as was information on black and Hispanic women who were not in the labor force because they did not think they could find a job—so-called discouraged workers.[12]

As in past years, BLS policy today requires that breakdowns of data by sex and race be considered in all programs, particularly those that are newly designed. The principal deterrent to publication of certain details from the Current Population Survey is that some of the sample numbers are too small to be statistically reliable. Another problem is one of limited resources. Finite limits are imposed on what we can produce because of publication cost, space, and time factors, as well as staff and computer resources. However, as this report illustrates, we place a priority on expanding our published data where a demonstrable need for the information exists. We also recognize the need for creating a bridge from an old to a new data series, an often time-consuming element in making changes. We will continue to make available a great deal of unpublished statistics on request.

Obviously, no one can predict the future with certainty. We do not know the extent to which working women will move out of the traditional occupations; or the degree to which women will gain earnings parity with men; or if their recent labor force gains will moderate. Whatever the scenario, however, women are likely to remain a permanent and important part of the work force. The Bureau of Labor Statistics will do all it can to see that reliable and timely statistics are available that are relevant to the 1980's and beyond.

[11] See, for example, *Employment and Earnings*, June 1979, pp. 61-67, table B-3, "Women employees on nonagricultural payrolls, by industry," and p. 69, table B-5, "Women employees on nonagricultural payrolls by industry division and major manufacturing group, seasonally adjusted."

[12] See Morris J. Newman, "New Statistics on Hispanics and Blacks," *Employment and Earnings*, Apr. 1979, pp. 7-9.

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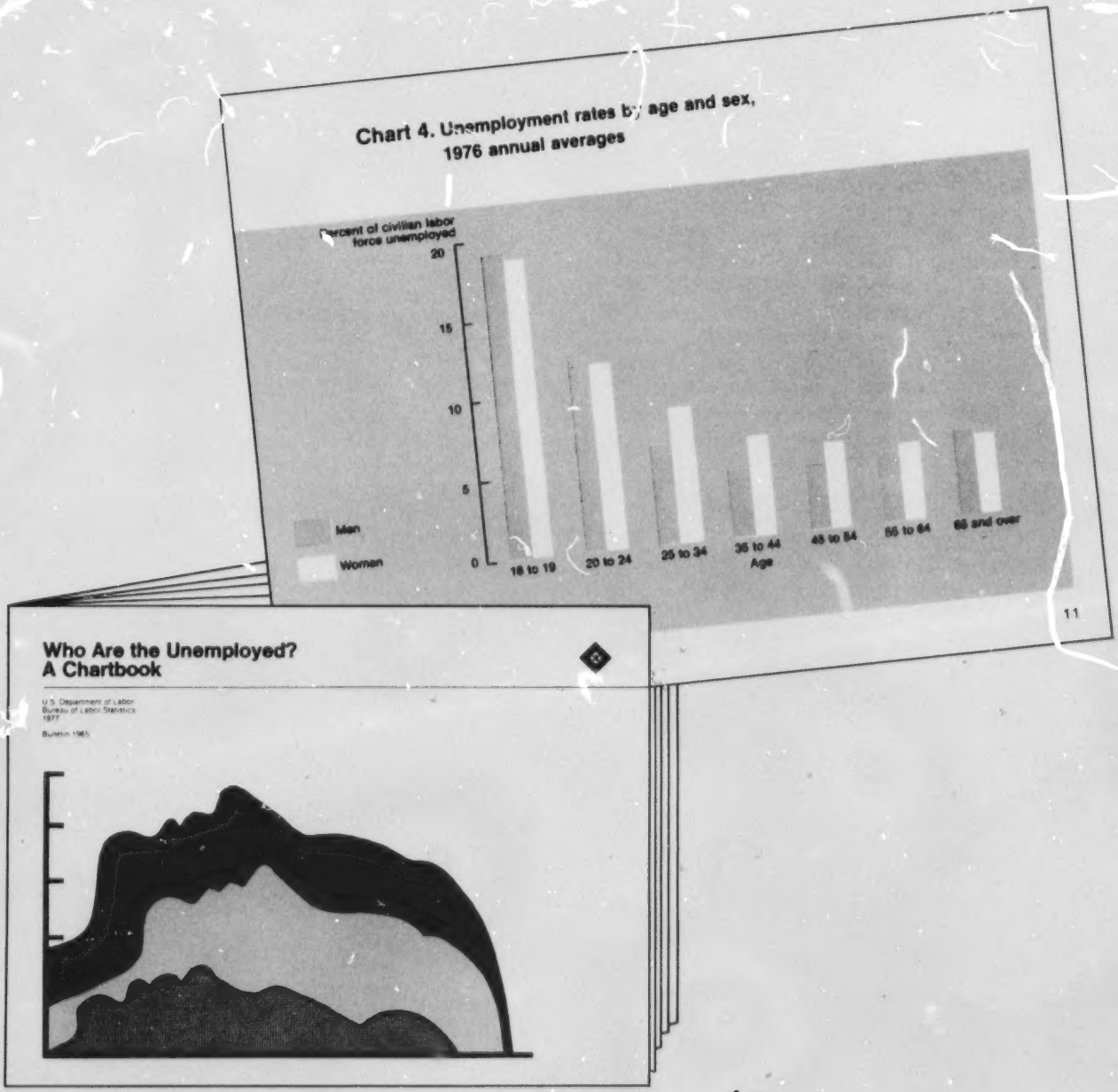

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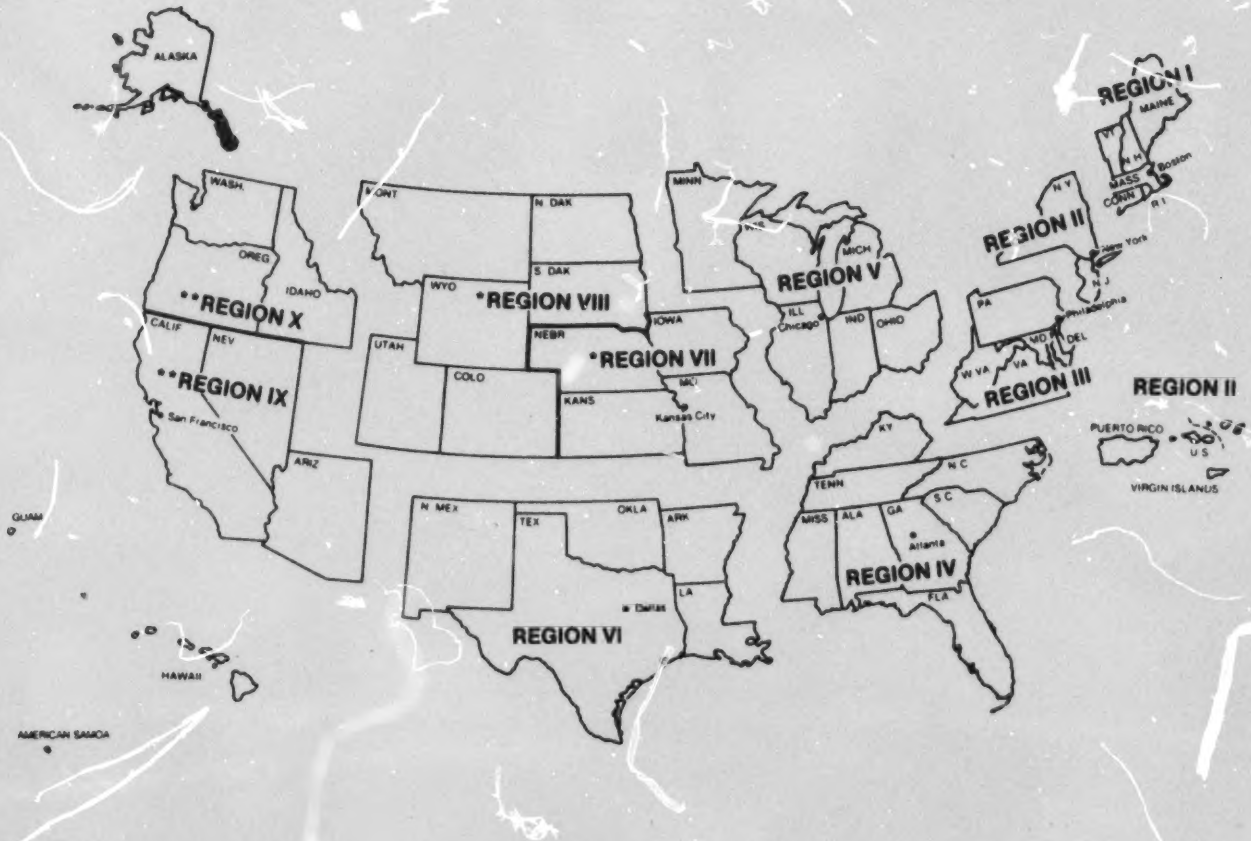

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